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ABSTRACT

The goal of sex equity in education is to provide unrestricted opportunities for all students. As a result of upbringing, most people have a different set of expectations, behavior standards, rewards, and punishments for females and males. This way of responding differently to each sex is called bias. Sex bias leads to sex discrimination, which has widespread effects on all persons. The three areas of bias most related to curriculum are textbook bias, language bias, and behavioral bias. Sex stereotypes are widespread in all these areas. Stereotyping denies the diversity, complexity, and variation that exists in any group of individuals. Even teachers with a strong orientation toward equity can act on stereotypes. The three steps necessary to eliminate sex stereotyping are awareness, understanding, and action. Teachers should evaluate their classroom environment to check for bias, include students in these activities, and take steps to make the classroom sex-fair. Students should be encouraged to take classes that are nontraditional for their sex, and other students must not be allowed to make fun of them. Two major pieces of legislation form the basis for sex equity in vocational education: Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and Title II of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984. Because they are shaping the lives of students, vocational educators have a responsibility to be as sex-fair as possible. (KC)

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MONOGRAPH

SEX EQUITY IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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MONOGRAPH

SEX EQUITY IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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TEACHERS CAN MODEL SEX-FAIR BEHAVIOR AND ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF RESPONSIBLE SEX-FAIR ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS IN THEIR STUDENTS.

INTRODUCTION

Sex equity is freedom from discrimination on the basis of sex. The goal of sex equity in education is to provide unrestricted opportunities for all students. When a student is able to make a decision without the influence of sex discrimination, sex bias, and sex role stereotyping, that student benefits by coming one step closer to the person she or he wants to be.

Sex equity activities are deliberate efforts to build partnership skills, enhance people's ability to work together productively, build stable and satisfying family relationships, expand career opportunities, achieve economic and political equity, and eliminate sex bias, sex role stereotyping, and sex discrimination.

GLOSSARY

Some commonly used terms include the following:

SEX BIAS Behavior resulting from the assumption that one sex is superior to the other.

SEX DISCRIMINATION Any action which limits or denies a person or group of persons opportunities, privileges, roles, or rewards on the basis of her or his sex.

SEX-STEREOTYPING Attributing behaviors, abilities, interests, values, and roles to a person or a group of persons on the basis of her or his sex.

SEX-FAIRNESS OR SEX EQUITY Treating both sexes in the same manner.

NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS Students pursuing occupations which have traditionally been held by members of the opposite sex. A girl pursuing carpentry, for example, would be a nontraditional student since this field has been dominated by men. Similarly, a man pursuing nursing would also be a nontraditional student.

NONTRADITIONAL PROGRAMS Those programs in which the enrollment of one sex is 0-20 percent.

SEX BIAS IN THE CURRICULUM

As a result of our upbringing, most of us have a different set of expectations, behavior standards, rewards, and punishments for females and males. This way of responding differently to each sex is called bias. Sex bias leads to sex discrimination. And sex discrimination has widespread effects on all individuals.

The three areas of bias most related to curriculum are textbook bias, language bias, and behavioral bias. Women are often excluded from written and verbal representation by the constant use of the pronoun "he". Women's image is undermined by the use of words like mankind, manpower, man-made, and by being addressed as Dear Sir. The

consistent placement of the male referent before the female referent suggests a greater importance to the male. This imbalance in word order (boys and girls, he and she, men and women) is commonplace, yet it has an effect on girls' self-images. When girls or women are referred to inappropriately by terms like chick, old maid, or sissy, the effect is even greater.

Stereotyping hurts both girls and boys. Stereotyping is the assumption that males have one set of abilities, interests, values, and roles, while females have a different set of characteristics. Stereotyping denies the diversity, complexity, and variation which exists in any group of individuals. It limits students' thinking about the roles, goals, and behaviors which are appropriate for them. The inherent assumption is that the roles and careers available for women are different from those for men. The possibilities students then consider are based on gender rather than on abilities or interests.

Observations of teaching behavior indicate that both female and male teachers hold sex-stereotyped images of appropriate goals for students. When girls are interested in traditionally masculine careers, they are often advised to further explore other career alternatives. Boys are also advised to enter sex-stereotyped occupations. This limits their potential and they often build career expectations that are higher than their abilities. Compromise, disappointment, and frustration can be the result. The strain and anxiety associated with conforming to the male stereotype may also affect health. The life expectancy of men is eight years shorter than women.

STEREOTYPING DENIES THE DIVERSITY, COMPLEXITY, AND VARIATION WHICH EXISTS IN ANY GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS.

Stereotypes teachers hold for their students on the basis of sex, race, class, or ethnicity may be manifested not only in the interpersonal climate of the classroom but in the physical structure as well. Displayed materials that show active boys and passive girls and show women primarily as homemakers and men engaged in stereotypic roles or occupations are continual visual reminders of limited options and alternatives for both sexes.

Recent studies show that the treatment students receive in class appears to be gender based also. Boys receive more active teacher attention in every category of teaching behavior. More active instruction, more listening, questioning, and more reinforcement is given to boys than to girls. Boys also receive positive and negative feedback for different behaviors than girls do. Girls receive messages that teach them to be passive and dependent while boys learn to be independent. It was also found that boys are most likely to be given detailed instructions of how to do things while girls are more likely to have things done for them.

EVALUATING YOUR CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Even teachers with a strong orientation toward equity for all students can portray these behaviors. Our biased attitudes were not formed overnight and changing them is a long slow process. Self-awareness is the first step toward change.

The three steps necessary to eliminate sex bias, sex-stereotyping, and sex discrimination are as follows:

1. AWARENESS of the inequities that exist and of their effects.
2. UNDERSTANDING the myths and realities of sex equity and considering possible solutions.
3. ACTION to overcome the inequities and encourage sex-fairness.

By making an intentional effort to evaluate yourself, you can slowly identify and eliminate patterns of sexism. Evaluate your classroom environment and ask yourself the following questions:

- Do textbooks, written materials, bulletin boards, and displays apply to all students in the classroom?
- Do they show women and men in nontraditional roles and careers?
- Is your verbal and nonverbal behavior free of bias?
- Do students have equal opportunities to perform all tasks?
- Are students of both sexes encouraged to enroll in all classes?
- Are females taken as seriously as males?

Patterns of sexism can occur inadvertently in many forms of communication. Identifying sex bias and exploring its effects leads to greater understanding. Have a colleague observe your classroom and profile your interactions with students. Include the number of times you interact with females and males, the number of times specific feedback is given and to whom, and the number of times explanations are given and to whom. If a colleague is not available, ask a student to help you record and assess the interactions. Or include the evaluation as part of a learning situation for students and have them examine their own interactions as well. Biased materials can be used effectively as discussion starters.

In this way students can freely express their opinions about sex bias and sex role stereotyping.

Other suggested activities include:

1. Encourage students to take requisite courses which will enable them to successfully pursue careers based on interests, abilities, and goals. Girls often do not take the math and science courses necessary to pursue training or college majors which lead to higher paying jobs.
2. Help students become aware of all career options, including nontraditional ones.
3. Offer students exploration experiences, information, and motivation to pursue all career possibilities.
4. Create a file of names of local business people who are willing to serve as mentors, speak in the classroom, or offer shadowing experiences to students.
5. Develop peer support groups for students interested in nontraditional fields. This will help them overcome barriers caused by lack of appropriate role models and sex role stereotyping.

NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS ARE OFTEN RIDICULED OR ISOLATED FROM THE OTHER STUDENTS BECAUSE THEIR INTERESTS DIFFER FROM SOCIETY'S TRADITIONAL NORMS.

6. Help students identify how sex role stereotyping, sex bias, and sex discrimination affect the following:
Career planning
Decision making
Occupational exploration
Occupational preparation
Job search
Employability
Job retention
Job advancement
Benefits and earnings
Professional development

NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

When girls or boys decide to pursue a nontraditional program, they can both encounter barriers. Often, there is a lack of same-sex role models who have been successful in nontraditional occupations. Students may find that tools or equipment are not suited to their physical size. Nontraditional students are often ridiculed or isolated from the other students because their interests differ from society's traditional norms. Because of these negative factors working against them, they may need special attention. Teachers need to be sensitive to these issues. Support groups or buddy systems with other nontraditional students can offer the extra support they need to resist being dissuaded from pursuing a career in which they are interested.

LEGAL BASIS FOR SEX EQUITY IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Two major pieces of legislation are directed at achieving sex equity in education: Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and Title II of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984. Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex against students and employees of education programs and activities receiving federal funds. It requires that persons may not be excluded from, denied participation in, or be treated differently in education programs on the basis of sex.

Title II of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act provides federal funds to states to expand and improve existing vocational education programs and to develop quality programs to meet the needs of the country's current and future work force. It ensures access to programs for those who have been underserved in the past and requires vocational educators to take affirmative steps to eliminate sex bias and sex-stereotyping in vocational programs.

WITHOUT THE PRESSURE TO CONFORM TO A STEREOTYPIC MOLD, PERHAPS ALL PEOPLE WILL HAVE GREATER SUCCESS AND SATISFACTION ON THE JOB.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF VOCATIONAL TEACHERS

Because we are shaping the lives of the students we touch, vocational educators have a responsibility to be as sex-fair as possible in their interactions. Vocational programs are designed to serve the needs of youth and adults who are preparing to enter the job market. The statistics on women in today's work force substantiate the need for more sex-fair treatment of students. All students need to be exposed to the full range of career opportunities. Teachers can model sex-fair behavior and encourage the development of responsible sex-fair attitudes and behaviors in their students. In this way, students will be better prepared for participation in the work force.

Vocational education gives definite purpose and meaning to student learning by relating subject matter to occupational goals. When occupational goals

are based on interests and not on stereotypes, our society as a whole will benefit. Both sexes deserve the opportunity to fully participate in life's experiences. Without the pressure to conform to a stereotypic mold, perhaps all people will have greater success and satisfaction on the job.

Much of the information in this monograph is contained in the videotape, "Sex Equity in Vocational Education," produced by the Center for Sex Equity. For information on obtaining this videotape, contact the Center for Sex Equity at 614-422-5001.

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